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ABSTRACT

The thesis discusses some difficulties involved in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Japanese universities and proposes cooperative learning techniques as a partial solution to these problems. This recommendation is supported by a selective review of the literature on group work in second language teaching and research on the negotiation of meaning in second language acquisition. Results of a study conducted in a Japanese university show that cooperative learning groups outperformed individual learners on many measures and performed equally well on others. The thesis concludes with specific recommendations for the use of cooperative learning techniques in EFL classrooms in Japan. (Author/KM)

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An Application of Cooperative Learning to Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Japan

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

Steven Paul McGuire

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Steven Paul McGuire
98 words

Abstract

The thesis discusses some difficulties involved in teaching English in Japan in universities and proposes cooperative learning techniques as a partial solution to these problems. This recommendation is supported by a selective review of the literature on group work in second-language teaching, and research on the negotiation of meaning in second language acquisition. Results of a study conducted in a Japanese university show that cooperative learning groups outperformed individual learners on many measures and performed equally well on others. The thesis concludes with specific recommendations for the use of cooperative learning techniques in EFL classrooms in Japan.

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Introduction

Teachers of English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) are a peripatetic sort who regularly find themselves in new teaching situations which require that they assess their new school's needs and goals and their students' needs, goals, and abilities. The ESL/EFL teacher must then use his or her training and experience to meet those goals and needs.

Teaching English in an EFL situation overall requires perhaps the greater adjustment. In addition to trying to learn what his or her new country's attitudes and approaches to education are, often with the added difficulty of a language barrier, the teacher in an EFL situation is faced with the additional challenge of getting sometimes large classes of students with the same native language to use the target language. The teacher may even come to question some of the basic tenets underlying the primarily ESL methods he or she learned in graduate programs in the United States, since it's often difficult to see how best to attain the primarily communicative goals of those ESL methods given the new classroom situation.

This paper will look at some of the special circumstances to be found at one university, Chukyo University, in Nagoya, Japan. Some of these special circumstances, such as infrequent class meetings (each class meets only once a week) and large classes (sometimes up to 100 students in one class) result from the common practice of regarding English communication courses as lecture classes. Other circumstances are reticent students which is a result of

both Japanese culture and of the emphasis in high schools on rigid discipline which tends to curtail free use of English. One further influence on language teaching at universities in Japan is a heavy reliance on a large number of part-time English teachers who usually teach only two classes one day per week at a given school, which can make curriculum planning and coordination difficult. The situation at Chukyo University is somewhat representative of the teaching situation at most universities in Japan as a whole.

There are quite a few positive rewards to teaching in Japan: whatever the lack of input into the program outside of the classroom there may be, inside the classroom the teacher has complete freedom. Teachers are given a great deal of respect from students, fellow teachers, the staff at the university, and society as a whole. The students may be low in proficiency, but given the right topics most of them can become quite eager to speak, especially one-on-one with the teacher outside the classroom and away from peer pressure.

The negative sides to teaching in Japan can sometimes present what may seem to be insurmountable obstacles to teaching English, especially to a teacher coming from an program at a large university in the United States which as a preacademic English as a second language program has very specific goals which the students are often quite motivated to attain since certain language requirements usually must be met before they can begin content courses in their majors.

However, the basic objective for the English teacher in Japan remains: to assess the needs and goals of the students and the school, whatever they may be. The challenge then becomes to find the best way to achieve those goals, adapting to the institutional and cultural constraints and taking advantage of the opportunities which present themselves.

This paper will look at one approach to teaching which seems to hold particular promise as a way maximizing students' acquisition of English in Japan: cooperative learning. Research will be presented on second language acquisition and communicative language teaching that supports cooperative learning followed by a discussion of how cooperative learning techniques can be used in a Japanese classroom. Last, the results will be presented from a small study comparing interactions and language acquisition between two first year oral communications courses as they performed a language learning task--one class cooperatively and one individually.

Communicative Language Teaching

Larsen-Freeman (1986) summarizes current thought on communicative language teaching (CLT). The goal of language teaching is to help students acquire "communicative competence." Larsen-Freeman describes "communicative competence" as

> "being able to use the language appropriate to a given social context. To do this students need knowledge of the linguistic forms, meanings, and functions. They need to know that many different forms can be used to perform a function and also that a single form can often serve a variety of functions. They must be able to choose from among these the most appropriate form,

> given the social context and the roles of the interlocutors. They must also be able to manage the process of negotiating meaning with their interlocutors." (p. 131).

Thus, communicative competence is not merely the knowledge of structures and vocabulary, which are important, but also the ability to negotiate meaning through interaction in a variety of situations which are authentic and realistic.

Larsen-Freeman describes a classroom in which authentic materials, perhaps a newspaper, a tape of an actual radio broadcast or even just a menu from a restaurant might be used in ways which encourage students to communicate as well as the students' current level of mastery allows. A variety of linguistic forms would be taught in the context of the function being practiced (discussing the possibility something will happen, for example). The number of forms taught would depend again on the students' level. Students would be in groups to maximize interactions: they would do role plays which would help encourage the use of appropriate language in a variety of situations, and play games, which has the benefit of giving immediate feedback on their language.

Larsen-Freeman also quotes Johnson and Morrow (1981) who see three features involved in communicative activities: *information gap*, in which interlocutors are required to exchange genuine unshared information; *choice*, which means that students are given the leeway and the freedom to choose how they will communicate, i.e., their interactions will not be tightly controlled to avoid mistakes or limit responses; and *feedback*, which means they get

feedback from the person with whom they're communicating as to whether their output was comprehensible or not and are given the chance to negotiate meaning. In a true communicative situation speakers are trying to exchange real information, and they need feedback from their listener as to whether what they're trying to impart has been understood.

Last, Larsen-Freeman says that activities in the Communicative Approach involve activities carried out in small groups in order to maximize the time allotted to each student for learning to negotiate meaning when output is not comprehensible.

Negotiating Meaning and Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

In recent years theories about how second languages are acquired have shifted. Researchers such as Krashen have posited that language is acquired best when learners are presented with comprehensible input that contains structures which are just a little beyond their current stage of mastery. The struggle to understand helps compel learners to learn those structures. However, researchers in second language acquisition (SLA) such as Swain (1985) have come to believe that the best aid to acquisition is not merely comprehension of language, which could conceivably occur without any interaction among language learners, but rather the need to produce language that is made comprehensible to others through negotiation of meaning. This negotiation would involve two or more people using clarification requests, repetition, elaboration, comprehension checks, etc. until both parties

understand the topic of discussion. Current theory hypothesizes that the more learners have to negotiate and struggle to make themselves comprehensible to others and the greater the total amount of interaction, the greater their second language acquisition.

Research on Second Language Acquisition

Swain (1985) backs her assertion that comprehensible input alone is not enough for SLA by citing her research on French immersion students which found that despite having a great deal of native speaker input, these students did not acquire French grammar well. She argues that this is because they were never pushed to actually produce French, and in fact frequently used English with each other. She proposes a sort of "Output + 1" hypothesis (as compared to Krashen's Input + 1) in which students would be pushed to negotiate meaning in order to produce output at an ever higher level of complexity. Swain's claims suggest to me that using cooperative groups would greatly increase the necessity of the students creating comprehensible output since they would necessarily interact with each other more and thus SLA would be facilitated.

Swain's notion of comprehensible output seems intuitively correct, since it is difficult to believe that language learners can just passively acquire language through exposure to it. Even children learning their mother tongue actively test their understanding by attempting to produce language. Learning

through comprehensible input alone seems akin to learning piano through watching a concert pianist and then using the think system.

Research on NNS/NNS Interactions

Comprehensible output is the result of two or more speakers negotiating meaning as they acquire a language. These speakers can be in a number of combinations such as native speakers (NS) alone, native speakers and nonnative speakers (NNS), and NNSs alone. Although it is interesting and useful to look at NS/NS and NS/NNS interactions (even if only to serve as a basis of comparison for NNS interactions and output), since this current paper is about language learning in an EFL situation this paper will concentrate on research that has looked at interactions between nonnative speakers.

Researchers examining NNS interactions have generally found positive results from having NNSs interact with each other. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) summarize research in NNS interactions by stating that in NNS/NNS interactions "communication breakdowns are more frequent, more obvious to both speakers, and have to be resolved by them (not by skillful S[econd] L[anguage] teachers with plenty of F[oreigner] T[alk] experience)." (p. 129).

Varonis and Gass (1982) and Gass and Varonis (1985) point to greater negotiation of meaning (modified input and output) in NNS/NNS interactions, mainly because NNSs are more likely to have what they call "pushdowns" or occurrences of misunderstandings which require explanation and negotiation of meaning, interactions which are assumed to lead to SLA. Pica and Doughty

(1985) report greater turn-taking and more output in NNS/NNS than in NS/NNS interactions. The researchers evince surprise that the students in groups made few of the conversational adjustments believed to lead to SLA. They propose that this may have been because the tasks the students were asked to perform did not lead to the use of these adjustments. This would happen, they state, in cases where each participant's contribution was not required in order for a group to complete a decision-making task.

Rulon and McCreary (1986) found that NNS students used sentences at the same level of syntactic complexity in groups as they did in the classroom and also that confirmation checks were more frequent in groups. They concluded that group interactions are at least as good as those in the classroom. This finding bodes well for the use of cooperative learning since other benefits accrue from cooperative learning, and knowing that group interactions are at least as good contexts for SLA interactions as in the classroom removes one potential worry about using groups from the teacher's mind.

Ushimaru (1992) carried out a study to see whether learners in an EFL setting can push each other to produce more grammatical and target-like output and to determine what effect task type had on the frequency of incomprehension signals in each task. The three task types involved information gap (in this case a one-way task in which one student in each pair had all the information), a jig-saw (in which students each had information the

other needed), and an open-ended discussion. Ushimaru found that the L2 was most grammatical in the open-ended discussion. He assumed this occurred because students were free to discuss what they wished and presumably were more likely to use forms with which they were comfortable. The information gap task elicited the least grammatical L2. The subjects gave the greatest number of incomprehension signals during the information-gap task and the open-ended discussion elicited the fewest number of incomprehension signals. Perhaps it would have been useful if Ushimaru had given more information on the total amount of interaction elicited by the various tasks which would have helped put the various tasks in perspective in terms of total amount of interaction by task.

Porter (1986) found that learners talked more (in terms of total words used) with more advanced learners than with native speakers. Also, in support of language groups that are heterogeneous in terms of language ability was her finding that learners made about one-third more repairs with intermediate than with advanced learners. Of course, these were paired interactions and it is unclear how the interactions would work in groups of three or more, but these results do seem promising.

Quality of Student Feedback

The above research does seem to answer concerns some have raised about having students interact with each other rather than with native speakers, at least in terms of the total amount of interaction as compared with NNS/NS

interactions. However, one question which remains is the quality of the feedback students can give each other on the grammaticality of their output. Porter (1986) looked specifically at the grammaticality of NNS student corrections and found a very low frequency of correction in NNS/NNS and NS/NNS interactions (1.5% and 8% respectively) but says that NNSs miscorrected each other only 3% of the time. These results are encouraging in that it may be possible to occasionally give students the task of giving each other feedback on grammaticality. She also found that in NNS/NNS interactions the NNSs' errors could be shown to be attributed to a repetition of incorrect input from other NNSs only 3 percent of the time. Pica and Doughty (1985) found that the students' productions were equally ungrammatical in both a teacher-fronted and a group situation.

Ushimaru (1992) laments that sometimes correct sentences were not comprehended by his subjects and had to be clarified. This does raise the question of the quality of input students give each other, but as long as the students are negotiating meaning in order to aid their comprehension of input, perhaps it does not really matter whether the input was originally grammatical or not.

It should be kept in mind, especially in EFL classrooms, that comprehensible output does not necessarily mean native-like (or grammatical) output. If increasingly correct output is a goal then a way must be found for

students to get accurate feedback about their output. However, if general fluency is the goal, then this is not as much of a problem.

One problem in the EFL situation is that students are negotiating meaning with other learners with the same L1 and so the negotiation may be easier in some ways (their language partner's pronunciation would be easier to understand, for example). It is to be hoped that the skills students in an EFL situation acquire in making themselves comprehensible to others with the same native language will transfer to situations in which they must interact with native speakers, but the question is often moot in EFL situations, since there may not be native speakers readily available with whom the students can practice.

A Cautionary Statement about SLA Research Findings

One must be careful in making generalizations based on research in second language acquisition (SLA) since there are so many variables to control and it is not always clear what factors did or did not bring about acquisition. As researchers themselves are quick to point out, subjects across studies are sometimes performing different tasks requiring different kinds of language use and different kinds of interactions, which makes comparison of the various studies difficult. Further, most studies on negotiation have not been longitudinal, and so cannot tell us whether or how negotiation affects learner language over time. The hypothesis that greater negotiation brings about greater acquisition is therefore largely still unproven, though widely believed.

It is important to keep in mind how native speakers would perform in the situations the ESL students are simulating as a basis for comparing the NNS/NNS interactions. If native speakers would tend to use the most efficient, least lengthy language required in the performance of a task, can we fault students for doing the same? For example, in a map task, once the schema has been clarified between two speakers, they might be able to give directions using one or two words without such connectors as "next," "after that", etc. Also, clarification requests and comprehension checks, which are often what researchers are looking for might be limited to repetitions. "Go right." "Right?" "Yes."

So, perhaps it is not surprising that students will not always necessarily check each other's comprehension if the task does not require it. In some studies researchers have found that students start telegraphing through the task once they know what is needed without using the language the researchers are looking for; this would naturally cause few occurrences of those language forms.

Another possible reason for the absence of "conversational adjustments" is that ESL students may not have been taught the specific language forms researchers are often looking for, and so do not make them. If students are taught these forms and are given a carefully structured task which encourages them to produce these forms (presumably a task in which native speakers would naturally produce similar forms), perhaps they will. If we accept the

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hypothesis that such adjustments really do promote SLA, then encouraging the use of them should be a primary goal in the classroom. Cooperative learning can provide such structured tasks.

The Teacher-Fronted Classroom

Many studies have compared group learning to teacher-fronted classrooms, implying that trained teachers would not be using pairs or groups. This is surprising since a cornerstone of communicative language teaching is to maximize student interaction, and most teachers seem to be trained to use pairs and groups to accomplish this. In defense of teacher-fronted classes, they can also encourage students to produce comprehensible output. Teachers *can* generate a lot of enthusiasm and participation among students even in a teacher-fronted class, if for example, students are required to comment on what another student has just said. And, any good teacher makes sure that students comprehend important information: sometimes the teacher may not want to take the time to explain everything, such as in an exercise in which students are to listen for specific information. However, to assume as some researchers seem to that teachers do not check students' comprehension and give them feedback on the comprehensibility of their output seems unfounded. If it can be shown that students can provide each other with feedback of reasonable quality in groups, then it still seems more efficient to turn that task over to them and to have the teacher walk around and keep loose tabs on what the groups are doing.

Researchers do point out that even in a teacher-fronted classroom the presence of these conversational adjustments does not ensure that every student will necessarily come to comprehension: the input may be incomprehensible both before and after adjustments have been made. Although teachers cannot *always* spend time to check comprehension, a trained teacher will check comprehension if it is *important*.

Since group work seems to be a good way to encourage interaction, some researchers in SLA have turned to studying group work and its more specialized application, cooperative learning, and the effect these two approaches may have on second language acquisition.

However, a problem common to many of the research projects comparing "group learning" and "traditional learning" is in their definitions of "group learning," "traditional learning," and "cooperative learning". It often seems that the researchers have put students into groups without implementing a cooperative structure and called it cooperative learning, and then compared the achievement of those groups as compared to students "taught in the traditional way" without clearly noting what "the traditional way" was.

There are two problems with this. The first problem is in regards to the definition of "traditional approach of language teaching." If "the traditional approach" means that the students are taught *only* in a teacher-fronted manner, it raises questions about the validity of the data since one wonders how many trained teachers actually still teach that way. The second problem is with the

definition of "cooperative learning." I will deal with this second issue on p. 22. However, before defining "cooperative learning" in detail, I will review the research on cooperative learning.

Research on SLA and Cooperative Learning

Group Learning and Cooperative Learning are not the Same

Although there has been some research involving groups in language learning, until recently there has been very little research dealing directly with cooperative learning and its effect on second language acquisition--at least research that fits the definition of cooperative learning.

The distinction is an important one. As will be shown in more detail in the section on cooperative learning, cooperative learning involves more than just putting students into groups and telling them to work together: many of the benefits of cooperative learning come from structuring the tasks in a specific way.

Thus, when researchers occasionally comment about the limitations of group learning, it is important to remember that their comments may not necessarily apply to cooperative learning. Also, when researchers actually do use the term "cooperative learning" one must examine whether they actually used a cooperative learning methodology in their classrooms or in their research or whether they just used traditional groups.

For example, in a comparison between "lockstep" teaching (actually teacher-fronted teaching in which all the students in a class are treated and

taught as one homogeneous unit) and group work, Long and Porter (1985) lament that while group work is better than lockstep for a number of reasons, it is not necessarily better than lockstep in handling all of the individual differences in language ability, motivation, attitude, learning experience, etc. of the students. However, as will be seen in a later section of this paper, when properly structured cooperative learning can deal with these differences.

That Long and Porter are speaking of group work rather than cooperative learning is clear from quotes such as "Small groups of students can work on different sets of materials suited to their needs. Moreover, they can do so simultaneously, thereby avoiding the risk of boring other students who do not have the same problem..." (p. 210). This misses some of the benefits found in cooperative learning of having students help each other acquire and teach each other material.

Doughty and Pica (1986) lay the blame for several of their hypotheses about the negative aspects of group work on the structure of group work itself. They state that in a group task "Many students tended to go along with the majority opinion of both their class and group when it came time to articulate the final decision." (p. 308). They later point to the tendency of linguistically weaker students to bow to the more proficient students in groups when resolving a conflict of opinion. They also found that some students tended to dominate the discussions. They concluded that group work may thus be an

inappropriate method for activating modified interaction among the students. Again, true cooperative learning can resolve some of these problems.

The negative view I have occasionally heard about cooperative learning even from fellow teachers has usually been the result of their experiences in classrooms in which those teachers as students were obviously put into completely unstructured and therefore often unsuccessful groups which were inappropriately dubbed cooperative learning.

Studies Involving "True" Cooperative Learning

One study which did look at the interaction between cooperative learning groups and second language acquisition was carried out by Bejarano (1987). Bejarano did a study in which students in an EFL situation showed statistically significant increases in their scores on an achievement test of listening and reading comprehension and on a discrete-point grammar and vocabulary test after working in two kinds of cooperatively structured groups as compared to students in a control group which received "traditional" (although presumably communicative) instruction.

Students were divided into three groups: one group was taught cooperatively using Slavin's Student Teams and Achievement Divisions [STAD], which involves having students tutor each other on material before competing in heterogeneous groups against members at the same ability level in other groups; one group was structured according to Sharan et al.'s Discussion Groups [DG], which places students in interest groups which together research

and discuss a topic; and the last group was a control group which was taught with a "whole-class method".

Unfortunately, Bejarano does not give any specific information on how the material was taught in any of the groups except to say that the teachers in the study had all received 25 hours of training in the methods used. We are also told that the teachers of the control groups received additional training to brush up their teaching skills so their classes could serve as "enriched" control groups, but we are not given any specifics as to how the teachers of the control groups taught their classes or whether teachers were specifically instructed to avoid the use of any kind of cooperative structures as part of the control.

However, Bejarano's results do seem to support for SLA what research on cooperative learning in other subject areas has found about the higher achievement levels students can attain by working in groups.

Hirose and Kobayashi (1991) did a study looking at the interactions among students in cooperative discussion groups in Japan and their attitudes towards cooperative groups. The researchers proposed that since Japanese learners often find it difficult to improve their oral skills due to limited opportunity for language practice outside the classroom, discussion groups incorporating cooperative learning principles can provide more opportunities in the classroom for comprehensible input.

Hirose and Kobayashi state that 79% of the students liked the activity and 69% of the students reported that the "friendly atmosphere within the group" helped them learn. The authors claim that it contributed to more participation, but only 38% saw "peer assistance" as benefiting their acquisition of discussion skills. The 79% figure is quite encouraging, but perhaps the authors could have given more statistics on the level of "encouraging participation," which they say was part of the lesson.

Research on Cooperative Learning outside of SLA

There has been a great deal of research outside the relatively narrow field of SLA on the quantity and quality of interactions and the achievement of students in cooperative groups in various disciplines and at all levels.

Johnson and Johnson (1989) reported the results of a meta-analysis of 521 studies of cooperative learning. Johnson and Johnson describe a meta-analysis as "...a method of statistically combining the results of a set of independent studies that test the same hypothesis and using inferential statistics to draw conclusions about the overall result of the studies...Meta-analysis provides overall estimates for a set of studies of the size of the effect that an independent variable has on a dependent variable based on a metric common to the studies being analyzed."

One statistic used in a meta-analysis is effect size. Johnson and Johnson report the use of effect size as "allowing for the examination of the strength of a relationship between independent and dependent variables.

Effect size describes the magnitude of gains from any given change in practice and thus eventually may be used to predict what can be accomplished by using that practice." The statistics given for effect sizes are somewhat related to the standard deviation, thus an effect size of .96 might be loosely regarded as showing a difference of nearly one standard deviation between what in this case is a comparison of using cooperative learning and competitive and individualistic methods of instruction.

Johnson and Johnson found that 50% of the studies evaluated were statistically significant on a number of dependent variables in favor of cooperation, including verbal skills and level of cognition (e.g., the quality of problem solving strategies in groups).

In studies of what they refer to as "pure" cooperative learning (i.e., not a mixture of various approaches of cooperative learning, such as jigsaw, STAD, Group Investigation, etc.: mixing up the types introduces so many variables that it is unclear which of the approaches in the mixture may be causing which results) the positive effect size of "pure" cooperative groups was .96. Their statistical analysis revealed that verbal skills (the only one of their categories which might relate directly to L2 learning) showed a standard deviation of .84 over competitive and individualistically structured tasks, and a $p<.01$ over competition ($F(3,118)=3.92$). A number of studies showed that individuals at high, medium, and low ability levels performed better on various measures of

achievement, such as retention and cognition, after learning in cooperative situations.

In their comprehensive search and analysis of all the literature about cooperative learning, only one study seemed to deal specifically with language acquisition. Johnson, Skon, and Johnson ([1980] cited in Johnson and Johnson [1989]) and Skon, Johnson, and Johnson ([1981] cited in Johnson and Johnson [1989]) found that young students in a cooperative group could put 12 nouns from four categories presented to them in random order into their proper semantic categories and in a way that promoted memorization. Only one subject taught in the competitive and individualistic conditions did so.

Johnson and Johnson (1989) summarize their findings by saying that "[a] conservative interpretation of the overall data would be that participating in cooperative groups does not hurt, and often facilitates the achievement of high-ability individuals, and clearly benefits the achievement of medium- and low-ability individuals." (p. 47). The Johnsons also report research by Frick ([1973] cited in Johnson and Johnson [1989]) and Webb ([1977] cited in Johnson and Johnson [1989]) which found that "individuals collaborating with peers with discrepant learning abilities learn more than do individuals collaborating with peers with similar abilities."

One research finding of special interest from Johnson and Johnson's (1989) meta-analysis was that students in cooperative learning groups showed an effect size of 1.17 over individually structured tasks in the ability to stay on

task. The z score was 8.62. This is especially encouraging if this effect could transfer to using groups in Japan where there could potentially be 13 *groups* of 3 in a typical speaking/listening class--13 *individuals* is almost the average number of students in language classes in the West. The chore for the teacher of keeping 13 groups of 3 working together is much easier than trying to do so with a large class of 39 students working individually, but even so there are still difficulties in organizing 39 people. It is encouraging that the research seems to support the idea that students in cooperative groups can keep themselves on task.

Communicative Language Teaching and Cooperative Learning

As was mentioned earlier, communicative language teaching encourages the use of pairs and groups in order to maximize the opportunities students have to practice the language structures they have been taught and to negotiate meaning, which SLA research has shown to be an important factor in second language acquisition. However, for group activities to take advantage of the powerful incentives to learn that cooperative learning can provide, there are five elements which must be accounted for in any cooperative activity. The following section gives a brief introduction to cooperative learning and to the elements required for an activity to qualify as a cooperative one.

What is Cooperative Learning?

There are three approaches to performing a given task: competitive, individualistic, and cooperative. Traditionally even when groups have been

used in American or foreign classrooms, students have still been graded in a competitive or individualistic manner. In the competitive approach, students compete against each other for a grade. In a bell curve the average score for a test is computed and becomes a "C". Then the grades are distributed according to how far they are from the average. If one student performs exceptionally well he may incur the wrath of his or her fellow students for "skewing the curve" or raising the average. In competition one student must fail for another to succeed.

In the individualistic approach the students might go through the material on their own at their own pace and be tested against a set criterion. Perhaps 90% or above on a test would be an "A," 80% a "B," etc. In this approach, what the other students do or how well they do it is irrelevant. Each student is a lone wolf on the hunt for his own individual grade.

Johnson and Johnson (1989) have shown that cooperative learning is more effective than either individually or competitively structured tasks. As defined by Johnson and Johnson (1991, 1:5), "cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning." Some teachers simply put 4 or 5 (or 6) students together and tell them to work together on a project and call it cooperative learning, but successful cooperative learning groups requires much more than just throwing students together.

There are many approaches to cooperative learning. The Educational Research Service (1990) summarizes a report by the Minnesota State Department of Education (1985) which describes the following attributes as being common to almost all types of cooperative learning: classes are divided into small groups with 2 to 6 members; groups are interdependent with high individual accountability; the students learn in a cooperative environment with a clear reward system; group objectives are clearly defined; and students support each other in their efforts to achieve and the group monitors group members' behaviors. The model used in this paper is the cooperative learning model as described by Johnson, Johnson, and Johnson Holubec (1991). In this model, heterogeneous groups are emphasized, which as will be discussed later seems to fit well into the situation in Japan. Below is a brief description of the five components of the cooperative learning as espoused by Johnson, Johnson, and Johnson Holubec.

1. Positive Interdependence

As the name implies, the goal of positive interdependence is to create dependence and reliance among group members. This means that the group's success can only come about if everyone in the group does a fair share of the work and only if every member meets the minimum criteria the teacher sets.

Whatever task the students are given to perform, each group member must feel that his or her contribution is necessary for the group's success. Students have to learn to work together in order to accomplish tasks, and in

fact, each group "sinks or swims together." No member of a group can succeed if any other member of the group fails to meet either a personal or a group goal set by the teacher.

If each student is not given specific chores to perform or goals he or she must attain in order for the group to finish a given task, one student can sit back, do nothing, but still reap the benefits of his fellow group members' labor. The industrious students feel put upon because they are doing all the work but may finish the shirker's share of the job by themselves in order to get a good grade. In the end only those students who have done the work perform well on the individualistic or competitive tests teachers usually give, but the nonparticipating students may get credit for group work they have not done. The industrious students in these situations may come to feel that working alone is better than in groups since those students "always end up having to do all the work anyway."

There are a number of ways to promote positive interdependence, but space will limit us to just a few. One commonly used is called positive resource interdependence. Positive resource interdependence can be as simple as having students share one sheet of paper describing the task or having them turn in one piece of paper containing the group's work. A more involved form of positive resource interdependence is to "jigsaw" the task. Just as a jigsaw puzzle has many pieces all of which are necessary to complete a picture, in a

jigsaw task each member has a piece to learn or a task that he or she has to finish and contribute in order for the other group members to finish theirs.

An example of a jigsaw task might be a murder mystery in which the clues to the solution of the crime might be spread among a newspaper, a radio news show, an interview with a suspect, a police report, a TV news show, etc. Each student in a group would be assigned the task of mastering the information given in one of the sources of information above and relating the information to the group as a whole. Students from different groups assigned the same task could even work together to help each other master the material before returning to their base group to explain what they have learned.

In positive goal interdependence the teacher might require that all group members meet their own individual goals or perform at a certain level on a given task in order for the group to pass or the teacher can average the scores of all group members for a group average score. If all students meet their individual goals or exceed them by a set amount, the whole group might receive an extra reward such as bonus points or class recognition as the "best group". This can encourage students to help each other attain their personal goals. Having group rewards for individual and group accomplishments is called positive reward interdependence.

Positive role interdependence involves assigning each student a specific role in a given task. For example, students might be assigned the following roles: "reader," who might read a paragraph to the group before they discuss

it; "recorder," who might record the group's decisions; "encourager," whose job might be to ensure that everyone's opinion has been heard--which might evidence itself in the form of "What do you think, Miyumi?"; or "observer," who might be assigned the task of making a mark under each student's name whenever that student used the language structure being practiced, for example, clarification requests such as "Could you repeat that?" or "Did you say 'convertible'?" Having a student fill out an observation sheet can be very useful in group processing (see below).

2. Individual Accountability

Individual accountability is often a natural result of positive interdependence. If a task is structured so that there is positive role interdependence, for example, each student is accountable for doing his share of the work so that the group is able to succeed.

Additionally, to encourage individual accountability the teacher might tell the groups that any member in the group might be selected at random (therefore not necessarily the "best" student) to show that he or she can do the assigned group task, can answer questions about the material, or even take a quiz on the material. One part of the entire group's grade might be based on the score the individual gets.

However, the students should also have a chance to do their best individually. There is thus a role for individual measures of achievement even in a largely cooperative classroom. It is unreasonable to assume that every

student can get 100% on a given test and gifted students may be afraid their grades may be lowered if their grades are totally dependent on how well the group does as an average. Also, it may put too much pressure on some students who may be afraid that they will hurt their group's performance.

So, in addition to holding the group accountable for making sure each student meets his or her individual goals, the students should still be given a chance to perform and be graded on their individual efforts. In a heterogeneous group, group success might be having an "A" student improve their performance to 95%, a "B" student to 85%, etc.

In fact, Johnson and Johnson do not call for a completely cooperative classroom. Individual and competitive tasks also have a role in a well-structured class. However, they do think cooperative learning should be used "...when we want students to learn more, like school better, like each other better, and learn more effective social skills" (1986, p. 4).

3. Group Processing

After each activity the students must have time, even a few minutes, to talk about how they performed as a group in doing a given task. If the particular skill being emphasized during the task was using comprehension checks, for example, the marks on the observation sheet the "observer" filled out could be tallied and discussed. This can serve as a benchmark for future performance. Group processing can be done either in groups or as a whole class.

Group processing is important in giving feedback to the students in order to positively reinforce the behaviors they are practicing. In fact, a study by Yager et al. ([1985] cited in Johnson and Johnson [1989]) found that cooperative learning with group processing improved performance and retention more than cooperative learning with no processing and individualistic learning respectively.

4. Social Skills

As mentioned earlier, working cooperatively is not an innate talent. Students need training in working together, and foreign language students might also need to be taught the language appropriate to working together. Surprisingly, even in Japan, a culture which seems to put the welfare of the group above that of the individual, students can benefit from practicing such social skills as encouraging everyone to participate, giving direction to the group's work, and expressing support and acceptance. Skills in negotiating meaning and expressing and resolving a difference of opinion would be especially useful for students planning to study in a Western environment. They might also be beneficial to SLA.

Granted, encouraging participation and expressing support are Western goals, but the benefit in Japan in giving the students some means of quantifying the above social skills and others is that the process itself can become a kind of game and even though students may see "encouraging others to participate" as a game, they will be more likely to do so and thus be

more likely to speak. Initially practicing some of these social skills might feel somewhat artificial to the students, but as the class continues to practice and add additional skills, these social skills and the language required to perform them can become automatic.

Johnson and Johnson have suggested that the ideal size for groups depends on the task being performed. They feel that groups should be no larger than three, at least in the beginning, since larger groups require the use of more sophisticated social skills. Even groups of four have a tendency to "pair off" rather than working as a group. Certainly, for many language learning tasks, such as those involving dialogues, having students work in pairs does seems practical. The group can pair off even with members from other groups with similar tasks and then regroup with their base group. For those tasks involving discussion and problem solving group sizes of three could be used.

5. Face-to-Face Interaction

Last, the groups have to be "knee to knee and eye to eye." That is, they need to be in close physical proximity. Japanese students tend to sit far apart from anyone with whom they have not interacted. Sitting behind or apart from fellow group can often be a kind of passive nonparticipation. Most oral communication classes are held in smaller rooms, but composition tends to be in large lecture halls with tiered, fixed seating, which makes it difficult (though not impossible) to use cooperative learning. In this case it just means that the

recommended group size of two or three becomes more practical for reasons not limited to theory alone.

General Background on the Educational System in Japan

Before looking at how cooperative learning can be used in Japan, perhaps it would be useful to first give a general overview on the culture and education in Japan which will help give some background which will make the discussion about some of the challenges in teaching English in Japan more meaningful.

Standardized Exams

Most of a student's future in the educational system and in the job market is determined by performance on quite demanding standardized exams taken to get into junior and senior high schools and into college. Competition is so fierce in these exams that students often start going to "cram" schools after school at a very young age in addition to hours of study at home so they can get into the right high school, which will help them get into the right college. In some cases, parents strive to get their children into the right preschool. The pressure to succeed is enormous. A common saying during "examination hell" is "5 hours of sleep, pass--6 hours fail." The Monbusho has recently added one additional free Saturday per month for students to use to enjoy themselves, but most people seem to assume that the students will use the extra day at "cram" schools.

Of course test scores are sometimes important in the U.S. as well, but in the U.S. entrance committees also give weight to other factors such as school activities, hobbies, etc. which is not done much in Japan in the selection process for entrance to universities except perhaps for certain sports scholarships. The quality of the university students attend affects the job they will get, since the more prestigious companies still interview mainly at the more prestigious schools.

In addition to the national exams for entrance into the prestigious national universities, students also have to take exams at each of the smaller private universities to which they apply. Each department at each of those universities gives its own entrance exams which students must pass in order to attend that university. Students will sometimes enter any department whose test they pass. Thus sometimes students are English majors even though they are more interested in business because that is the test which they passed.

In the 1991 entrance exams at Chukyo University, a medium-sized, medium-quality private university, for example, about 14,000 students took exams competing for about 3,000 places. Over a million students take the national exams in an attempt to qualify for the 12 quality national universities.

In fact, except for jobs requiring special skills (chemistry, statistics, engineering, etc.), companies care more about which university the student attended than about the student's field of study or their grades. Companies usually have a 3-6 month training period in which new employees learn about

the corporate culture of their new employer and also learn what they need to know to do their jobs. Beginning employees are moved from job to job throughout the company so they are trained in and know the workings of every department in the company. So, since companies have their own intensive training programs, they just want to be assured that their prospective employees were able to run the gauntlet and get into college. What students learn in college or what their majors were is not important.

That is perhaps a bit of an overgeneralization, since companies often have their own series of common knowledge exams which students must pass in order to be hired at a particular company. It is interesting to note, however, that the students take these tests *after* their initial interview (at which the student's ability to fit into the corporate culture as a team player is ascertained) and that they must score only 50% or better.

Occasionally one hears of students who get around these rigid though loosening hiring practices and go from a medium-range school to a prestigious firm, but they are usually the exception and exceptional students. Nowadays more companies are hiring from a greater variety of schools. Although all new employees begin at the same level, apparently the quality of the school attended will affect the speed of the track the employees are put in.

The Teaching Situation in Japan

This is an interesting time to be teaching in Japan. The Monbusho (the Department of Education) has recently lifted many requirements thus granting

colleges and departments far more freedom in the courses they require students to take in order to graduate. Also, some colleges are beginning to try to coordinate the efforts of all English teachers--even part time teachers who have traditionally not been involved in program planning. However, change in Japan (as anywhere) takes time, and a number of things will not be affected soon by the Monbusho changes. In any case, teachers will always have to find ways to optimize student·learning.

Adding to the difficulty of teaching in Japan is the fact that the typical course load for non-tenured teachers on non-renewable contracts in Japan is 8 or 9 courses. Each of these classes meets only once per week for 1 1/2 hours. Often there is very little overlap in courses meaning that the teacher is rarely teaching two fourth year speaking classes for which he or she can prepare one set of materials, for example, so teachers must prepare lessons for 8 or 9 different classes per week. Granted a teacher in many programs in the U.S. might be teaching the same total number of hours per week, but the Western teacher has a much greater feeling of continuity since he would be seeing the same students throughout the week. Each class in Japan meets for a total of about 26 times in an entire year at best, which means that in the course of a year teacher-student contact hours are about equal to that in one quarter at an American university.

At Chukyo University in Nagoya, Japan the workload for foreign invited lecturers has over the last two years slowly been reduced to 6 courses per

week, although still with very little duplication of courses. This year I will be teaching four of those six classes as speaking/listening courses at the 1st, 2nd, 3rd year repeater levels (which I will describe in more detail shortly), and additionally there is one 3rd-year composition course and one special oral communication course for teachers to be.

Description of the Classrooms

All of the speaking/listening courses are taught in the AV Center. Each room seats up to about 45 students, has movable chairs, a small blackboard, and videotape machines. The composition courses, however, are in large lecture halls which seat up to 100 students. The seats are arranged in tiers, are spaced narrowly apart and are immovable. This makes group work, which would be the best solution to the large class sizes, very difficult.

Description of the Courses

Class sizes for the speaking/listening courses over the last three years have ranged from about 5-10 in the 2nd and 3rd year repeater courses to an average of about 40 in the regular 1st through 4th year classes. The composition classes average about 50 to 60 students (except for a bureaucratic slip one year which caused one composition class to have 120 students). The oral communication students were split by the university into two groups which alternated each week between viewing a video and attending class. The English language courses are smaller than some of the "regular" lecture classes which can number up to 300 students, but still can have up to 40 students.

In addition, in many ways each English class is treated as a unique course with no prerequisites. In other words, there are students who fail Oral Communications (OC) II (second year English) but who still advance to OC III (third year) and then even on to OC IV (seniors). And, since some students apparently put off making up English classes they have failed until they are juniors or seniors, students often register for English language courses at many levels at the same time and all with the same teacher. Thus there are usually students who are taking an OC II repeater course, an OC III repeater course, and a 4th year course all at the same time. In a perfect world, they would have to have mastered the 2nd year before progressing to the 3rd year.

Also, the English classes meet for the same limited 1 1/2 hour period and the same limited number of times as the regular classes, which limits practice time and makes progress slow. Students meet even less frequently in those classes which have been split into two groups and therefore see the teacher only on alternate weeks or alternate semesters in the interest of lowering student/teacher ratios.

Perhaps the largest impediment to teaching foreign languages in Japan is that language courses have to fit into the same framework as the "regular" lecture courses. In a regular content course such as, say, mathematics, the teacher can lecture and have the students go home to absorb the material at their leisure. This is not as easily done in language courses, at least not in those aimed at encouraging communicative competence. While it *is* possible to

have students take their books home to study and practice language structures, the emphasis in the English language courses taught by foreign teachers at Chukyo University is on interaction, which for reasons given below is difficult to encourage outside of class.

The regular non-native English speaking staff teach literature and what are considered to be the "mechanics" courses, such as grammar, vocabulary, reading, pronunciation, and as of next year composition. The focus of the oral communication courses, which are taught exclusively by native speakers of English is somewhat unstated, but generally the intention is that the students communicate and interact with each other and the native English speaking teacher, which has to be done in class for the most part. Since the students need to communicate in class, it is possible to send students home to learn a dialogue or new vocabulary in preparation for the next class, but students often find it difficult to practice with each other outside of class for a number of reasons.

Numbering among these reasons are that except for some athletes relatively few students live on or near campus. Since Chukyo has no dormitories, many students are living with their parents; often in other districts. Some students commute up to 2 hours each way. Many others are working part-time jobs in addition to taking classes, since although Japanese parents tend to pay tuition (at Chukyo tuition is relatively expensive at about $7000 a year), many students work in order to be able to afford luxuries. Thus, most

students leave school immediately after classes are over to commute home. Those students that do remain on campus usually do so to take part in club activities so they have little extra time to devote to practicing English. Last, much of their remaining time and energy is devoted to part-time jobs. So again, much of the learning they do in English oral communication has to be done in class.

The result of having no prerequisites is that the students in the 4th year courses, for example, can vary quite a bit in the material they have mastered, and therefore also in the help or review they need. A teacher with 40 students can find it difficult to tailor the course to meet each student's individual needs. Additionally, this makes it difficult for the teacher to reuse material in different classes in a given week, since many students will have seen it before. And of course, since these students are almost all seniors, they are assured of passing (even if they do sometimes manage not to pass a course, they are given make-up exams until they do). A few schools will make failing students redo their senior year, but these schools are still a minority.

The Culture of the Classroom

Many Japanese students feel self-conscious about speaking to a fellow student in English; for this reason they do not take advantage of the chance to do so even when it offers itself. Also, Japanese students are especially shy about trying out any skill before mastering it, especially if it means they might stand out (for good or bad) in front of a whole class of their peers. This can be

said of students almost anywhere, of course, but it is particularly evident in Japan where the emphasis is on group harmony. Additionally, there is an added cultural burden involving what are called senpai/kohai relationships, or the relationship between older and younger classmates. The senpai/kohai relationship goes beyond the upper/lower classman distinction found in the U.S. (perhaps more so at military academies) since even within a class year students are aware of their position, and the lower classmembers will usually defer to their elders and therefore be quite reluctant to correct an upperclassman's language.

This reticence, combined with the traditional role teachers have long had in Asia in which they impart information which the students are to passively and dutifully accept without question makes for very quiet and passive classes. Students are also unlikely to ask questions since it implies that the teacher has not explained the material correctly and also might put the teacher in the embarrassing position of not being able to answer the question. Also, their sharing a common language often makes it difficult to keep them speaking English--even assuming the teacher does get them started.

Classroom Personalities

Different classes at the same level can for some reason show almost as much variation as can exist between students. Even entire classes can have different personalities. Although the freshman oral communication class that meets during the 4th hour is still quite passive when compared to classes in the

West, there is much more energy and willingness to participate in the 4th hour than in the 3rd hour class of freshmen.

Attendance

Students often miss classes for a variety of reasons, both excused and unexcused. There are several excused absences over which the teacher has no control; taking company exams and going for job interviews are regarded as excused absences, as is student teaching (many of the students in the Department of English are training to be high school English teachers).

The courseload students have is probably another reason for the low attendance. The average freshman and sophomore has 15 different 1 1/2 hour courses per week. Juniors and seniors have about 10. Even the motivated students I have talked to say they pick and choose the courses they actually attend, so a typical senior only goes to 6 courses per week.

Unofficially students are allowed to miss 1/3 of their classes (although this is more an accepted practice than an official rule) and the near guarantee that students will graduate and find jobs means that students take advantage of this rule. College is regarded by society as a whole and even by college professors as a sort of vacation period between the long, intense preparation for the college entrance exams and the long hours graduates will put in as new employees at whatever company they end up with. The professors I questioned seemed less than enthusiastic about calling and finding out the official rule. This poor attendance makes it difficult to stretch lessons beyond

one class, since except for a very small core of students who attend regularly the population of each class changes from week to week and continuing the lesson to a second week requires reexplanation of the task.

It must be said that the students are not doing anything that is not expected of them by relaxing a bit during their college years. Most college professors seem to feel that universities should be taken more seriously by students once those students have been accepted to a university, but it does appear that universities are fulfilling the roles expected of them. It is important for the foreign teacher to keep this in mind.

For the teacher, too, there are several functions which take precedence over class time. Staff meetings or even the regular staff get-togethers are often scheduled during, and take precedence over, classes. Since the get-togethers cannot officially start until everyone has arrived, classes are often canceled so that staff can make it on time. Altogether, these cancellations mean that the total amount of time available for student interaction can sometimes be very low.

The low number of classroom contact hours between the teacher and the students and the large number of legitimate reasons for canceling classes can make the teacher quite sensitive about any activity which cuts into those hours and can make the teacher even more eager to find a way to keep students attending as much as possible.

The Students

Just as in many countries, there is a wide range of quality among the various colleges and universities in Japan. Perhaps in Japan the ranking is a little more rigid, however. As mentioned above, the standardized entrance exams which students take determine quite precisely which universities they can attend, and this in effect determines the range of quality of students at any one university. The students at Chukyo University are generally considered to be about average compared to the overall group of students attending college. Of course the students also show a wide range of ability in English depending on the quality of the high school program from which they came and individual ability and some minor personality variation (even in Japan there are extroverts of a sort!).

Although the entrance exam procedures in Japan do lead to students at any given school being somewhat homogeneous, students have a wide variety of backgrounds in English experience and ability. Some have traveled abroad, some have had native speaking teachers, and some just have a natural ability in languages.

First year university students are at a level pretty close to the Japanese students right out of high school we see in ESL programs in the United States, although of course students who come to the States have self-selected themselves somewhat in doing so. English textbooks written specifically for the Japanese market often refer to students in Japanese universities as "false

beginners" in that they have had 6 years of English but often have had little opportunity to use it communicatively.

However, surprisingly, the students in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th year classes at Chukyo show very little improvement in language ability over 1st year students, although students do relax a bit and are a little more willing to experiment after their first year. In fact, the ability of many of the 1st year students is much better than that of the older students.

Sakai (1991), in an analysis of the language ability of students at Chukyo University, proposed that one reason for the higher performance of 1st year students over 4th year students is that the Monbusho (Department of Education) has in the last few years changed the English requirements for high school students. Unfortunately, Sakai did not have access to the results from an internationally standardized test to analyze students' English language ability. Instead students were given an in-house test based loosely on the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication--distributed by the Educational Testing Service of Princeton, NJ) which is called Test of Basic English for Communication.

While it may be true that freshmen show better language skills than their elders because of improved teaching in high schools, it is also likely to be due to deterioration in the skills of their elders because of the lack of coordination among university teachers and the low amount of actual contact time between students and teachers at university.

Positive Comments about Motivated Students

All the above is not meant to imply that there are no motivated students. There is a core of students in most classes who are interested in learning and improving their English. After class there are usually a few students who are willing to converse. Away from the pressure of performing in front of other students many students will show a good sense of humor and a willingness to talk casually (and rather fluently) about a variety of topics. Most students also show more personality in their journals, which only they and the teacher usually ever see (and I always warn them when other students *will* be looking at them). There are even a few brave souls who can often be relied upon to answer questions in class, which can help the other students get over some of their initial shyness. All of these students make it easier not to get too discouraged and make teaching worthwhile. It makes the search for a way to let them show this same sense of freedom to communicate in class worthwhile as well.

Given the correct topic to discuss or project to do students can become quite enthusiastic. In a composition class taught in the Macintosh computer lab this year, students were quite eager to learn what they perceived to be a useful skill to have when applying to companies. This was reflected in the journals they turned in each week which got longer as the semester progressed. Even more gratifying was how much the students helped each other learn the computer system. Since there are more students than computers, students were working at computers in pairs. Students who were having trouble

understanding the instructions in English were sometimes helped by their partners who had a more intuitive sense of how the computer worked.

An Assessment of Student Needs

The fact is that most Japanese students will not have many opportunities to use their English in Japan once they have graduated. Many students in my classes in the Department of English Language and Literature will be high school English teachers, but even those teachers will be constrained to use the textbooks supplied by the school where they will be teaching and will be expected to teach in the traditional way.

So, the most immediate use some of our students will have for English will be to pass standardized English tests which have a heavy emphasis on grammar in order to get teaching jobs. These tests emphasize translation from English to Japanese and passive knowledge of pronunciation. The majority of Japanese students need enough English to pass the English portion of exams to qualify for job interviews at companies.

Although all the students discussed in this paper are majors in the Department of English Literature and although all of them until this year have been required to write senior papers on some topic regarding English, papers written in English are the exception. This is perhaps reflected in the perception that composition is mainly a grammar course.

Once they have found work students probably will not have the time or inclination to keep their English up, so perhaps the teacher's goal should be to

give them as much chance to use English as possible while they learn about foreign cultures. Perhaps they will remember what they have learned about other countries long after college.

The Staff

The Department of English Literature as Chukyo University has only two quasi full-time American native English teachers (technically teachers in these positions are regarded as part-time workers with a full-time teaching load), and about eight other part-time native English speaking teachers.

Although there is a trend at Japanese universities towards requiring English teachers to have a background in ESL (which still can be as little as a 30-hour TOEFL certificate), the only requirement for teaching English at many universities is to have an M.A. in any field. That is not to say that a person with an M.A. in economics or art history cannot be a good English teacher, and many are making a sincere effort to teach the best they can, which shows itself somewhat in the attendance at the national conferences for English teachers (such as the Japan Association of Language Teachers [JALT]), but sometimes teaching styles can be a little strange.

Some teachers are having their students use the language lab for their courses. One teacher gives students grades based on the total number of minutes the new attendance computer shows they signed into the lab during the semester. If you think about it, this is backwards: the cleverer the student, the quicker he or she will understand a particular video and the sooner that

student will leave the lab. So, the grading system is backwards. I wonder whether anyone warned the students of this system. If students who care about their grades knew about this grading practice, they would take care to stay in the lab the prescribed time whether they needed to or not. I personally stopped the lab from trying to apply this procedure to my students, at least.

That same foreign teacher is grading his classes on a strict curve--even those that are supposedly composed of more advanced, motivated students. Also, he always grades tougher during the first semester so the students will not get too lazy. Apparently this is a common enough approach in Japan that "regular" Japanese faculty I asked about this did not consider the practice unusual. It is apparently based on a logical premise: if a student gets an equivalent of an "A" in the first semester, he may figure that he is guaranteed a passing grade for the year and decide to coast through the second semester and skip more. Only the final grade at the end of the second semester counts towards the overall course grade.

The Foreign Teacher's Perceived Role

In a survey of the attitudes of Japanese faculty at several university, Kay (1991) found that foreign teachers at many schools are not considered part of the regular staff. Even new Japanese faculty are not expected to contribute ideas during their first few years--those years are considered a period in which they can learn the system--and since the trend is for foreign teachers to be on limited 2 or 3 year contracts they are not really expected to remain long enough

to understand the system well enough to make useful contributions. Oftentimes this is reflected in the fact that foreign teachers are not expected to contribute to the curriculum and are not given money for research or for attending conferences.

Perhaps the attitudes towards the foreign teacher are a reflection of the fact that for many years teachers at Japanese universities have not necessarily been ESL professionals and perhaps this will change over time. At some universities that do have a larger, long-term foreign staff there is often a chance for the foreign teachers to have a little more input into the curriculum (although with the Japanese "top-down" approach; the decisions are apparently still made at the top). However, the belief that the only requirement teachers need in order to teach English in colleges is that they have an M.A. in any field and be native speakers of English unfortunately still persists.

The Curriculum

Until recently at Chukyo University there has really been no significant attempt at central control of what is taught at each level at all. In Japan the teacher has absolute control over what is done in the classroom. Japanese administrators seem reluctant to impose outside restrictions (even guidelines) on the teacher, since it is assumed that the teachers as professionals know what they are doing and what the students need. Suggestions would be an insult.

Sakai (1991) gives a loose description of the goals of Chukyo University's Department of English Language and Literature.

> The new curriculum seeks to improve the overall teaching learning environment, both through reduced average class size and increased coordination and planning between the Oral Communication instructors and the regular faculty. Problems, such as putting much emphasis on correcting students' attempts to speak, frequently only serve to limit their efforts and willingness to experiment with and experience the foreign language. From the Oral Communication perspective, however, we intend to minimize practices or methods which intensively correct students' efforts and keep the point of view in mind that such practices often become a source of inhibition for the student. Instead, we seek to encourage a relaxed environment where natural fluency is the desired objective...we endeavor...to encourage the development of basic communication skills in listening and speaking, while also expanding the students' broader sphere of understanding.
>
> The emphasis is on active skills, that is teaching the actual spoken language and not on teaching "about" the language. To accomplish this, however, considerable effort needs to be given to refocusing our course offering and to employing methods and tools that best effectuate these ends. In lines with this, considerable effort has been made to enhance the language laboratory facilities and to increase student utilization of the same. As the number of students involved has increased, so has the opportunity to improve the student teacher ratio within the average classroom situation and to implement student ability grouping. (pp. 108-109)

For the most part students are put into English communication classes according to their last name and stay together year by year regardless of their performance. The exceptions are students who have somehow gotten outside the mainstream either because they have studied overseas or because they have somehow managed to fail a class. These returning students are put into what the Japanese call "repeater classes". Actually, for me repeater classes are

better than most of the others, since most of these students are there because they have shown some special individual traits that enabled them to study in Australia for a year, for example. These students bring a useful and refreshing willingness to use their English in class.

Chukyo University's Solutions

The faculty at Chukyo University has spent a great deal of time discussing how to improve their curriculum and has made modifications where they have been able to, but the quickest changes have usually come from outside pressure. For example, it was decided to split each class at all levels of the speaking/listening classes into two smaller sections. Two years ago the groups alternated by semester (spending one semester in the video lab and then one with the teachers) but last year and this year they alternate every week.

This practice began mainly because a former foreign teacher just took it upon himself to tell half his class to get out. The faculty scrambled to find something for those students to do and settled on the idea of sending the idle students to the language lab to watch a video. Even though that teacher is no longer there, the school continues this practice since it is felt that the benefits of smaller class sizes outweigh the cost of less frequent interaction with the teacher.

Unfortunately, funding for a teacher to supervise the language lab is still being sought, so the groups watching the video have no supervision except

that they must log in using a new attendance computer Chukyo bought for this purpose. There is no control on logging in, so many students will often check in their absent friends on the computer. Random checks of the students listed as being in the lab compared to the actual number of students in the lab usually show a great discrepancy.

Another new course, "Oral Communications V" was the result of a decree from the Ministry of Education. It is a course intended primarily for those students who are planning to be high school English teachers. It is believed that the students in this course will be much more motivated, and to a large extent this is true. These courses are generally quite enjoyable, since although the students still tend to be a little quiet, they are a bit more outgoing than the other students. Until this year, this was the only course for which there was a textbook assigned by the university rather than by the teacher, mainly because this course is divided into three sections and is taught exclusively by foreign teachers and it was felt that since it was a new course there was an opportunity for some coordination among the teachers.

Getting Part-Timers to Work Together: Problems

Probably most teachers would agree that a modicum of independence for teachers is a good thing, but that some coordination would also be a good thing since students go from teacher to teacher every year and it would be useful to know what work the students coming into each level have done. There is a clear need for some general understanding about what skills should

be taught at each level. However, some of those same teachers would chafe at anything more than general suggestions as to what to teach.

One must have official sponsorship in order to work in Japan, and one's sponsor usually requires a full-time commitment. Most foreign teachers in Japan emulate their full-time Japanese counterparts and work to supplement their (sponsored) full-time job. This can be quite a lucrative proposition. Even full-time foreign teachers sometimes have very little interest in following a curriculum--even if there were one--or in developing new materials. Most teachers have materials they have used for years and begrudge the time to learn or develop new ones. Part-timers are even less cooperative, since their strongest affiliation must be with their sponsor.

Even when the part-timers are willing to work together on a curriculum, it is very difficult to arrange meetings, since most have very busy schedules teaching at sites scattered throughout the day and throughout the Nagoya area. Many teachers in Japan have an amazingly full teaching load. One foreign teacher, in addition to 12 hours of teaching at Chukyo University at one point was teaching an additional 18 hours at four different schools. Another was teaching a full-time load at two different schools. The high cost of supporting a family in Japan or even just the allure of high-paying jobs for the single person can make it very easy to fall into a heavy teaching load.

Unfortunately, many of the changes mentioned above have met with resistance from at least two of the part-time teachers who are not participating,

mainly because they were not consulted in the course planning and because the changes that were suggested (such as having all teachers at each level use the same textbook) were not supported with sound pedagogical reasons for making the changes.

Chukyo University is currently in the final stages of planning for a new building which begins construction in Fall 1993. The new building will house a completely new language laboratory and AV Center. Often in a country which makes changes as carefully and deliberately as Japan does, the greatest opportunity for local level change is in the context of more general often greater changes. Perhaps the faculty will be able to make some of the other positive changes they have been clamoring for during the planning for the new building.

A Possible Solution: Cooperative Learning

Until that time, change will have to be limited to change within the classroom. From the above description, it is easy to see why it would be very tempting to view the situation as hopeless because of large classes, low attendance, low student motivation, and a cultural background that encourages reticence.

While cooperative learning will not provide a solution to or surmount *all* the difficulties listed above, and while the cooperative learning model as used in the U.S. does not necessarily fit perfectly into the teaching situation in Japan, it does appear to have a number of positive features which would lend themselves quite well to the teaching situation here which will be discussed in

the next section. The rest of this paper will deal with how and why to apply cooperative learning to teaching in Japan.

Many teachers, both Japanese and foreign, have used traditional group work somewhat successfully even from the elementary level on to deal with some of the above problems (having students go into groups in a grade school was even part of a popular TV serial in Japan). However, this has often involved just putting students into groups and giving them vague instructions to work together, which is not always effective: students need more focussed goals and more structured activities, especially Japanese students who have rarely been given much responsibility for their own learning.

Cooperative Learning in Japan

On the surface Japan seems to be a perfect place for cooperative learning. It is a culture in which the welfare of the group takes precedence over that of the individual. Every action is evaluated in terms of how it will affect the group and indeed the need to get a group consensus on any issue involving the group is often hard for Westerners to understand and frustrating because of the time consensus takes.

While it is true that cooperative learning does seem to be a good solution to many of the problems mentioned earlier, it also appears that it is not an absolutely perfect fit into the educational culture specific to Japan: sometimes it seems like the group mentality can almost get in the way. There seems to be a very strong disinclination to deviate from the perceived group

norm: a student will go to great lengths to avoid openly outperforming his classmates and thus is reluctant speak in class since he might show himself to be above or below the norm. Another way to say this is that while positive interdependence in groups comes easily in Japan, individual accountability does not.

Some benefits of cooperative learning are that although some students are not very concerned about grades, or interested in participating in class, if a group's performance depends on each individual contributing then perhaps attendance will go up and motivation will increase.

Group members can complement each other's strengths and weaknesses in English. Each student has a different background and ability in English which he or she can bring to the group. As mentioned earlier, since group cohesion in Japan is so important, university students are often kept together and are allowed to take higher level courses even though they have not passed the earlier courses. In groups students can pool their resources to accomplish tasks. Perhaps one student might have a strong vocabulary which he or she can supply to the students with a strong background in grammar.

Cooperative learning can maximize the students' interaction in English. It can take a little of the burden of running large classes off the teacher so that she or he can spend more time as a problem solver and motivator and concentrate on a more global level while students work in groups.

Some other potential benefits of having the students interacting in groups rather than with the teacher are that each student gets more chances to speak, there is less of a temptation for the teacher to use what has been called "policeman's English" or a style of rapid-fire question and answer in which the students are only expected to give very short answer which the teacher can readily check, there is less of a temptation for the teacher to help or interrupt the student, and students may be much more comfortable saying "I don't know" in groups than in teacher-fronted classes.

As mentioned earlier, Japanese students are very reluctant to try a skill before they have mastered it, especially in front of the whole class. By working in small groups which stay together for long periods they can build trust and can therefore practice in front of fellow group members they have become comfortable with before they perform for the entire class.

The varied attendance can often make it difficult for the teacher to stretch a given lesson beyond one class period since students who missed the previous lesson need to be briefed on what they missed. This is a great time waster since the students who did attend have to listen to the same explanations over again while the teacher brings those who were absent up to date. If students are kept together as a group, they can be given the responsibility of updating the students who were absent on what they missed. Since Chukyo University only has 10 minutes between lessons there are always stragglers to each class: having a set period for filling other group members in

would be a good way to buffer some of the disruption of latecomers and also perhaps allow the teacher to stretch lessons.

Attendance could be easier to take: a missing student is much more noticeable in a group of three than in a group of 30 or 40. If students have chosen a name for themselves (one way to establish a group identity), the teacher can just ask "Cherry Blossom group, who's missing?" rather than doing a time-consuming role call.

One way in which both the competitive and cooperative approaches can be incorporated into a task is to use intergroup competition. If used in a fun, nonserious way intergroup competition can help cement group identity while giving students the chance to compete as part of a team. Japanese students can be quite competitive, especially in group activities. Some possible games might be getting points for answering questions correctly, finishing an assignment first, or even a spelling bee. The games should not be too serious and the rewards should be nonacademic ones since in some ways there are benefits to trying to establish and maintain a group identity as a class as well as a feeling of belonging to a smaller group. Japanese students can really become quite animated and involved in competition, perhaps because of the strong cultural incentive to always do one's best. Use of group competition can allay some of the negative aspects of competitiveness.

Using group work in order to make some of the larger classes more manageable does seem a viable alternative, but without an organized approach

to group work groups in Japanese classes can often lose their momentum on any given activity. Then the teacher's role can become like that of those Vaudevillian performers who keep five plates spinning on five different poles: once the teacher has managed to get the conversations going (or in this analogy, the plates spinning), he has to run around and give each one another spin to keep them all going. These educational acrobatics are not impossible, but they are a challenge, are very tiring, and are not necessarily the most efficient use of the teacher's or the students' time.

It also takes time to convince the students that they are, indeed, expected to get out of their seats and go talk to the other students. Even in small classes and even after having been in language classes for a couple years, students often do not even know their neighbors' names (although again, they *will* know their neighbor's social position in relation to themselves, i.e., whether they are "senpai" or "kohai"!). So, it is sometimes necessary to make a point of going to each group, telling them to stand up (to their surprise), walk them over to another group and introduce them ("Group 1, meet Group 5; Group 5, Group 1") and then have them do the activity. Things go much better once they get the idea.

One way to take the burden off the teacher in a large composition class is to have the students critique each other's work. This is difficult in the States as well, but it is even more so in a culture as nonconfrontive as Japan. Some have suggested having students critique essays anonymously, but the logistics

of doing that in a class of 50 students seem quite daunting. Another difficulty in the composition classes is that the students are very low in terms of writing ability. Until recently (and it is still largely so) the emphasis in standardized exams was on passive language knowledge, and most of the preparation in high school was towards passing standardized exams which contained little or no active application of language. This is a problem with tests in the States as well, of course, but even more so here in Japan. Thus, the students have never really had to generate essays, and since their language ability is low anyway, it is difficult in the short amount of class time we have together to get them to the point where they would be at a level where they would be able to write something to be critiqued.

Cooperative discussion groups can be structured such that problems of lack of participation and motivation can be overcome by giving the students a group goal. In the experiment carried out by Hirose and Kobayashi the goal was to produce a summary sheet of a given discussion to include the chosen position and supporting reasons. Students were given newspaper articles and other material to read on a particular topic and then after the language needed for clarifying ("Pardon?") and encouraging ("Go on") was taught, students were told to take and defend a position based on their readings. After the discussion the students were given a summary sheet to fill out with the group's consensus on the topic.

Hirose and Kobayashi (1991) also taught the language skills useful in a discussion: encouraging reticent members to contribute, persuasion, how to negotiate meaning, requesting clarification, etc.

A couple of important points about this particular study are that the authors claimed to have had 40 highly motivated students and that discussions would be more difficult in lower level, larger classes. Also, they do not say whether they set up the activity in English or Japanese. The amount of time it would take a non-Japanese speaker to set up the activity would of course be an important factor.

However, it is sometimes too easy to assume that low level English students are incapable of carrying out a discussion; given the right topic they can be quite enthusiastic. I recently overheard a student raving about a lesson a colleague gave on the environment--a very relevant topic in Japan nowadays.

Potential Pitfalls

A major concern in using cooperative learning is that Japanese students prefer interacting with "the native speaker" to speaking to each other. They are skeptical about speaking to others who they feel might make language mistakes. This is perhaps an even greater concern in group learning, in which interaction with other group members is more emphasized.

This is an especially important concern since Japanese students have a definite preference for communicating with native speakers since they do not have many opportunities to do so. This is a general attitude reflected even at

the school and societal level: there are many Japanese teachers who could easily teach oral communication courses in English but students and parents (the consumers in this case) and the faculty themselves believe they are unable to teach English as well as native speakers. The students need to be convinced somehow that they *are* able to give useful feedback to each other. Of course, the teacher needs to keep this preference in mind in his teaching. The goals of cooperative learning should be presented so that students see that they will still get feedback and interaction from the teacher in addition to practicing with each other. The time a student can spend interacting with two or three other group members is much greater than they can interacting with the teacher in a teacher-fronted class of 30 or 40 students.

The teacher must make his or her role in the cooperative classroom clear to the students. An early discussion of the teacher's role should help prevent the students from seeing cooperative learning as a way for the teacher to sit back and read the newspaper. The teacher could have a specific "language teaching" role such as circulating among the students and listening for grammatical errors in the group conversations. He could then help the class discuss errors together as a whole. Also, if the teacher makes a point of circulating, although not necessarily interfering, the students will see that the teacher is still playing an active role.

There may be more work for the teacher just beginning to use cooperative groups. In addition to having to teach new material and social

skills, and work behind the scenes to set up the situations, and evaluate performance, since there are no textbooks which teach English using the cooperative approach, almost every lesson will at first need to be adapted. This is a skill at which one can become adept over time, but in the beginning finding a "cooperative twist" to lessons can be quite a challenge.

Faced with 6 to 8 nonoverlapping courses to teach each week (or even 9 at some schools), the teacher may find it a very daunting task to get started using cooperative learning. However, Johnson and Johnson suggest that a good approach at first is to have only a small part of each class be cooperative. Over time the teacher will be able to build a repertoire of cooperative lessons and will find the effort worth it. Even brief "turn to your neighbor" tasks such as "Ask your neighbor what he or she did last weekend" can be good, short communicative tasks (once the students understand that you really want them to talk with their neighbors!).

Another important pitfall is the amount of time the teacher has to devote to discussing the concept of cooperative learning itself. A large amount of specialized vocabulary is involved in cooperative learning, and given that it is vocabulary which the students are not likely to need later, the teacher may elect to have some of his explanations translated into Japanese, perhaps with some words glossed in English in case the students need to ask questions about the material. This will make it easier to get the cooperative groups up and running without wasting precious time teaching a method rather than teaching English.

A common argument against cooperative learning is that gifted students (and others) dislike learning in groups feeling they would do better on their own. It is a valid concern: gifted students should not be left with the feeling that they are carrying the burden of teaching the other students which should be borne by the teacher. However, research has shown that helping someone else learn can in turn help the "student teacher" improve his acquisition and retention of the material. This needs to be emphasized to all students, gifted or otherwise--even in Japan. Japanese students may not always voice their dissatisfaction--especially to the teacher--but it is important to allow for the possibility.

Making Lessons Cooperative: Some Examples

Johnson and Johnson have claimed that any material can be adapted for teaching, so let's look at a cooperative lesson adapted from a book named *Pronunciation Pairs* (Baker and Goldstein, 1990) which teaches both listening and production of English sounds through paired contrasted sounds, such as "s" and "z" for example.

Using the traditional approach the teacher would read through the examples and pairs himself (or use the tape accompanying the text if the teacher is not a native speaker). However, since there are tapes available for each unit, the tapes could be easily incorporated into a cooperative lesson.

The first thing to do is to divide the students into groups of three. Since most of the students share the same L1 and hence have similar problems with

pronunciation, in this case a random selection process for groups works fine. If there are enough students whose English is particularly good, they could be used as a core resource in each group or as "assistant checkers" later in the lesson.

Next, the teacher assigns each group a set of sounds to learn. The groups can decide who gets which set of sounds, or they could also be randomly assigned.

Each student listens to a different section on the tape in the language lab and reads the accompanying exercises in order to become "a master" in the sounds taught. Since they will have to teach the other members in their group their particular sound, this is a good example of sharing resources which comes under the category of positive interdependence, and it means they are individually accountable to their group for learning their sound.

Next, students meet with those in other groups who have mastered the same sounds to check their learning. While they are checking each other out the teacher (and his "assistant checkers") can go around the room to verify that they have indeed mastered the sounds. This feedback stage is important for two reasons. It prevents students from misteaching a sound and it shows teacher involvement in the process.

Then the students return to their original group where they teach their sound to other members in the group. They can use the exercises in the

textbook just as the teacher modeled it and as the students have practiced it in the language lab.

Any of the social skills, such as encouraging participation or checking answers could be worked into this lesson, nor should group processing be omitted, of course.

Once all group members believe that everyone has learned the sounds, the teacher can test either or both of the students in each group who were just taught the sounds. Every group member is held accountable for every sound taught. This is an example of individual accountability.

So, this lesson has the major elements of a good cooperative lesson: positive interdependence, individual accountability, social skills, group processing and face-to-face interaction. Of course, in an ideal situation the more of the work the students do that can be done outside of class, the better, since class time is precious, but for the reasons stated earlier regarding Chukyo being a commuter campus, etc., finding a way to get students together outside of class can be difficult.

Now let's look at one more sample lesson, this one from Oral Communications V (OC V). In OC V one activity in the textbook, *Speaking for Oral Communication* (Wells, 1986) lends itself perfectly to cooperative learning groups. Each chapter of the book ends with a cartoon to which students are supposed to add captions describing the cartoons using their own words and the vocabulary from the reading in that chapter. The traditional way to deal

with the photo would be to have each student write his or her own paper, check it for errors themselves, and turn it in. The following is how it might be done cooperatively.

Groups are told to describe the picture, but the teacher wants only one page from the group to which each group member has contributed. Together they must come up with sentences about each picture frame. One person should be given the role of writer but once the story is written, the group as a whole is responsible for checking what has been written for grammaticality, spelling, and punctuation. Once the group has checked their story for accuracy, they write their names on the top and turn it in. This single page could be given a group score.

Individual accountability comes from the fact that any member of the group (and not necessarily the one doing the writing) will be asked at random to retell the group's story in front of the whole class by memory after the pages have been collected.

This lesson lends itself well to practice encouraging. While completing the task itself one student can be assigned the role of keeping track of encouraging words or even how much the group did their work in English. Together the class can talk about how they did and the "best" group can be given some kind of reward (bonus points, exemption from some task, etc.).

The previous section offered some general examples of how cooperative learning might be used in a number of language teaching situations. The

following section is a report on a study investigating how cooperative learning might be used to solve a specific problem at Chukyo University.

A Study on Cooperative Learning in Teaching EFL in Japan

As mentioned earlier in this paper, all sections of oral communications from freshman to senior years at Chukyo University have been split into two groups which alternate each week from seeing the teacher in the classroom to watching a video in the language lab (L.L.). The problem with this solution to large class sizes is that the students must work in the L.L. completely without supervision from a teacher. A possible solution which would give the activity in the L.L. the structure it currently lacks would be to put students into cooperative groups which must go to the L.L. (or even the computer lab or the library) together. The students could be required to work together to produce something which can later be evaluated by the teacher (hopefully something easily evaluated since splitting the classes into two doubles the number of class groups the teacher must deal with).

However, rather than just sending Japanese students off in cooperative groups and assuming based on the literature that the benefits of cooperative learning will automatically accrue to this situation, the following small study was carried out to test that assumption.

A very broad goal of this study was just to observe in a controlled situation how Japanese EFL university students could do on a cooperatively structured task as compared to an individual task both in terms of performance

and in terms of their interactions. However, since the primary benefit of sending students together to the L.L. in cooperative learning groups is the structure it can give activities and the interdependence it can bring about which can help keep students on task, this study only needed to show that there were no significant negative results in the quality of the students' performance in groups as compared to performing individually. Of course, this study also did hope to find positive results in terms of performance as a result of working cooperatively over working individually.

One research question was whether what the students have learned in groups transfers to new situations as well as or better than material students have learned individually. That is, would the language they used on the skits written one week after they viewed the video contain equally long or longer and equally or more grammatical sentences than those of the students who did the skits individually or would there be some sort of negative transfer in the output of the cooperative groups due to group dynamics (wrong answers being promulgated by stronger voices)?

A second question was, would new L2 forms used in the groups in the in-class activity based on the video lab book be better acquired, retained, and applied three weeks later on a post-test? Cooperative learning research suggests that retention of material is better after working on it cooperatively.

Since the first year classes have been split ever since I began teaching at Chukyo University, one peripheral goal was to get a feel for the classroom

dynamics of teaching large, unsplit classes. The low frequency of class meetings (26 per year without splitting) and therefore the limited contact with the native English speaking teacher often made me question whether it would be better to have classes meet together and work in cooperative groups in the classroom rather than continuing the practice of sending the split classes to the L.L. on alternating weeks.

General Design

This is a cross-sectional study in an instructed setting. This study was of a quasi-experimental design, since although students were assigned to particular sections of the first year oral communications courses according to their last name, which could be considered random, the teacher had no control over that placement process.

For the purpose of this study, two sections of first year oral communications were used. In one section the students worked completely independently (the "Independent Students" [IS]) on the in-class activity, and in one section the students worked together in groups of three (the "Cooperative Students" [CS]). The class in which a cooperative group structure was used was chosen randomly. In this study the class which was randomly chosen as the cooperative class generally seemed to be quieter and less communicative in the semester preceding this study.

Also, the class times were set by the department, and since the two first year courses met in the afternoon on Fridays, which for many students was

their 13th course of the week, there may have some effect on performance in both sections.

Subjects

The subjects were a total of 87 students at Chukyo University in Nagoya, Japan in two sections of first year "oral communication." The 3rd hour class (the CS group) consisted of 21 males and 22 females. The 4th hour class (the IS group) consisted of 19 males and 25 females. Students varied in proficiency levels according to their personal experiences in English, opportunities to travel, exposure to native speaking teachers and friends, and natural ability.

Overall females performed significantly better than males ($p<.05$) on a separate final exam unrelated to this study (the means were 80.5 [SD=14.3] and 72.2 [SD=14.2] respectively). Also, the higher performance of the IS class on the final quiz, which was unrelated to this study, approached an observed significance on a t-test of .07 (the mean score for the IS class was 79.5 [SD=13.8] and for the CS class it was 73.8 [SD=13.8]).

Elicitation

All students in this study took a short pre-test the day of the treatment to check their knowledge of the functions and structures taught in this study. The questions came directly from *On Track* from Oxford Press. This video and the accompanying lab book had been used the academic year preceding this study in the language lab and represented the kinds of tasks the students have had to do in the lab for the last three years. Students apparently enjoyed the

book very much, since they used one of the units from the lab book in skits presented by the English Club outside of class.

Included in the pre-test were two word-level CLOZE sections, one of which listed the words which could be used to fill in the blanks and one section which did not. Of course, on the pre-test the students had not seen the video, so they had not been recently exposed to the language they needed to fill in the blanks. The results of the pre-test give some measure of their knowledge of the forms coming into the study.

Design

Students in the IS and the CS sections watched the video together. The CS students were put into groups of three by "counting off". The video lab book had a number of exercises drawn from for the pre- and post-test, and the in-class activity. A number of sections from the lab book were also included to check students' overall comprehension of the video and the students' ability to expand on what they had learned.

The unit chosen for this study was called "Vacation for Two" in which a married couple goes to see a travel agent to plan their vacation. The problem is that one wants to go skiing and one wants to go to the beach. The travel agent helps them resolve their differences. This unit was chosen because the number of characters (three) matched the group size I wished to use. All students watched the video together and then the important language points

and sociolinguistic elements involved in arranging a trip in the United States were taught in a teacher-fronted manner to the entire class.

It could be argued that the CS group could have been taught cooperatively, but since this study was trying to recreate a typical situation in which the students are taught material in class and must practice it independently of the teacher in groups in the language laboratory, it was important that students in both groups receive the same treatment in order to determine whether working together or alone was an important variable in their success in completing tasks.

The IS section completed the task individually with as little interaction between students as possible. The CS section worked together in groups of three. The teacher was present in both sessions. Having a teacher present prevented the CS section from consolidating into one large group to do the task, which is the tendency in Japan. However, it is hoped that at a later date groups could be sent to the lab to work in groups without supervision, since that is what is necessary at this particular university due to lack of staffing. At that time, keeping groups separate will not be as important as during this study, in which controlling which students worked together was considered to be potentially useful to the data analysis.

One week after viewing the video and doing a lab book activity in class both sections were asked to create a dialogue for a situation similar to the one they had seen in the video. The CS students worked in the same groups as

they had previously. The situation they were to write about was a married couple visiting a Japanese friend for a two week vacation in Japan. As in the video, the husband and wife each had different ideas about what they wanted to do during their short vacation and the students had to write a skit in which the characters discussed and resolved this difference of opinion.

In the CS section each student was randomly assigned a role card describing which person's dialogue from the script they were primarily responsible for creating. This was to help the students avoid having to choose who was to have which role, which is culturally difficult for them to do. The purpose of this part of the study was to see whether because of the greater interaction in the CS section the students in groups could recreate more of the dialogue than could the individuals, and whether the final product (the script they wrote) would be longer and more grammatically correct.

Following cooperative methodology, group members were randomly assigned the role of "stenographer", the role of making sure everyone in the end had an equal share of lines in the final script they wrote, and last, the role of checking for agreement on the accuracy of the script. Once all were in agreement, everyone "signed off" on the group script.

Both the IS and CS sections were told that they might be asked at random to perform their script in class and that they would be responsible for the grammar and language in the video and in their script as a motivator to help encourage participation and completion of the tasks. This might have

encouraged short scripts, since the students may have felt that the shorter they made the skits the less they would have to be responsible for, but most students seemed to have kept working throughout the class time allotted to writing the skits and so this does not seem to have been the case.

One advantage of having an assigned "stenographer" is that it may have removed the possibility that the CS members might have shared the labor involved in writing their skit and thus be more likely to write a longer script than the students in the IS group, who had to write all the lines themselves.

The IS section each individually wrote a script for the same three people as the CS section was writing. The IS students had the same role cards as the group members did in order to keep the information available to them on a part with that available to the CS groups, but they had to write the script and check it for accuracy on their own. The IS section students were not allowed to interact with other students during this exercise.

Although the teacher was present while both sections were doing the task, no additional help was given the students in order to ensure that all students had the same source of information (the video and the teacher-fronted explanation). This also follows cooperative learning methodology in that it encourages groups to solve minor problems and answer minor questions in the group first before involving the teacher.

Roughly three weeks after the treatment all students were given a post-test to check their retention. The post-test was closely modelled on the pre-

test. The post-test was to show whether the recollection was better after having worked in groups than having worked individually.

Although much of the research on SLA involves oral communication which would have been much more interesting to look at, for the sake of this study, the written modality was chosen to ease the students' ability to correct their production and to ease the raters' evaluations. It was feared that the tension of having tape recorders running would introduce a variable that would make the interactions in the CS group too different from what happened in the IS group especially since there would of course be no interaction in the IS groups.

Results

The first research question asked whether the skits of the CS group would be equal to or better than those of the IS group. The cooperative groups tended to write longer skits in terms of c-units despite the suspicion I had at the outset that the added need of having to work together in groups might involve more discussion about what they wanted to say before even starting to actually write the scripts--something the IS students would not need to spend time doing. The observed significance level on t-tests of the total number of interactions in the skit between the CS and IS groups was better than .01 (in other words, in the CS groups' skits there was a greater number of turns taken for the characters in the skit). The mean for the CS groups on total number of interactions was 11.3 and for the IS group it was 8.7 (the S.D.s were

3.08 and 5.40, respectively). The skits the students in the CS groups wrote were also significantly longer ($p<.01$) in terms of c-units than those of the IS class: for the CS group the mean was 16.6 (S.D.=3.05) and for the IS group, 13.9 (S.D.=5.40). The skits they wrote were not significantly different in terms of grammaticality, however, although the statistic ECU, which was the total number of errors over c-units was higher for the IS group (44.6 for the IS group and 35.9 for the CS group). The observed significance for ECU approached significance ($p=.07$).

The second research question asked whether CS scores on the post-test would be equal to or better than scores of the IS group. Except for a couple of instances where the CS students outperformed the IS students (discussed below), there were no significant differences in performance between the CS section and the IS section on most sections of the post-test. Since the hypothesis was that the CS students would perform as well or better than the IS students, the second research question can be answered affirmatively.

Generally students performed equally well on the pretest, with the 3rd hour having mean scores of 75.0 out of 100 and the 4th hour 75.9. Females performed significantly better on the CLOZE section of the pretest which required them to supply the missing words on a CLOZE section themselves.

The CS students showed significant improvement between the pre-test and the post-test over the IS students only on a part of the in-class activity which included CLOZE sections in which they had to fill in the blanks using

words which were provided. There was no significant difference on the CLOZE activity for which the words were not provided.

Discussion

In working on the skits, it is to be expected that the CS group would be more lively than the students who were asked to work quietly, but it was striking that for a class which in the previous semester tended to be quiet and uncommunicative, there was quite a lot of activity as they worked out the skits. There was more of a "group feeling"--laughter and easiness, in the groups than in the "regular" classes, although this admittedly is a subjective observation.

The IS students were industrious but quiet. Many seemed to get restless about 20 minutes into the writing activity, which seemed to be less of a problem in the CS group (which may also have resulted in longer skits). The task may have felt like a test to the IS group since they were required to work quietly and independently. This may have made them nervous despite my repeated reassurances to the contrary. Also, writing a skit individually may take more energy than working in a group and sharing ideas.

The role play cards may have had some influence on the length of the skits, since most students incorporated at least part of the language used in the role cards into their skits. However, since both classes had the same role cards, both should have been affected equally, although this may also have been a task in which having 3 group members each working to incorporate the language used in the role cards into their part of the skits led to longer skits.

Perhaps the lack of improvement of the CS group over the IS group between the in-class activity (on all but the CLOZE) and the post-test can be explained in a number of ways. First, it may be that too much material to absorb was squeezed into the single class period in which the in-class activity was performed. If more time had been available for teaching, for the in class activity, for expansion practice based on the video and feedback either from the teacher or the other students, the retention might have been better later. All students in both groups would have benefitted from more time to go over their answers.

One reason for a lack of improvement may have been that the activities were not structured cooperatively enough. There was a degree of positive interdependence since they had to produce one product but since the students knew that the activities were not being graded, they may not have felt pressure to do their best on the various tasks. Knowing the activities would not be graded may also have led them to not feel individually accountable for the material. This may have especially been true on the followup activity, which was done after the final exam. Also there was no time allotted for the students to process their performance as a group, which has been shown to have an effect on retention. Last, the classes were so crowded with all 40 students in the classroom at the same time that it was difficult for me to ensure that all groups had their chairs arranged so that they were face to face and eye to eye which may have led to some nonparticipation by some of the group members.

Implications of the Study for Teaching

This final part of this paper study will look at the implications the study raised regarding having the students write, perform, and watch a skit in the L.L. and in the classroom. We will briefly discuss point by point how each of the major elements and subcomponents of a good cooperative learning lesson should apply in future attempts to have students perform skits. The T-chart in Table 1 summarizes this organization.

Positive Interdependence

The tasks performed in the study had many of the subcomponents of positive interdependence mentioned earlier. Students were given a specific goal, to do the lab activities and to write a skit based on the video they saw. However, in a skit activity which would take place over a longer period, the students might be asked to make sure that each member of their group would be able to give the meanings of any vocabulary they used in their skits. Role interdependence was brought about in the study by assigning students in each group in the study the cooperative role of "checker," and "stenographer." In a more carefully planned skit activity one student would have the additional role of "observer" whose job would be to mark the observation sheet as given in Table 2. All students would have the role of "encourager" and "clarification checker".

Also missing from the in-class activity was any kind of reward interdependence, since students knew that the skit and lab activities were not

Table 1

ELEMENTS REQUIRED IN A COOPERATIVE LESSON	WHAT THESE ELEMENTS LOOK LIKE/SOUND LIKE
Positive Interdependence	Resource Interdependence Goal Interdependence Reward Interdependence Role Interdependence
Individual Accountability	Any group member might be chosen to tell the story line of the skit Spot quiz on language or vocabulary of the skit Showing the videos of group skits: both the planning and the performance
Group Processing	Talk about the process/look at observation sheets: How much did they stay in English? How often did they encourage? How often did they use clarification requests?
Social Skills	Encouraging participation Being an attentive listener Clarification requests
Face-to-Face Interaction	Students are facing each other and are sitting close together

Table 2
Sample Observation Sheet
(Based on Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, [1991])

	Student A	Student B	Student C	Total
Clarification Request (Sounds/looks like) *Did you say "X?"* *Could you repeat that?* *What does "Y" mean?* _____				
Encouraging (Sounds/looks like) *Attentive listening* *What do YOU think?* *Good suggestion!* _____ _____				
Using Japanese				
Total				

going to be included in their grade. In our followup skit rewards would be public acclamation if they managed to stay in English the most, for example, or selection of the tape of their skit for the whole class to see. They might also receive bonus points if their group performed well on a vocabulary/language quiz about the videos.

Resource interdependence would be brought about by having students turn in one script from each group. Students would be responsible for making sure that each member of the group had an equal amount of participation in the final script. This skit would be checked for accuracy by the teacher.

Individual Accountability

Of the five elements involved in a good cooperative lesson, individual accountability seems to be potentially the most problematic for Japanese. I say this based both on my experiences in the classroom in Japan over the last three years and more specifically based on the study. Students are unaccustomed to being held responsible for their learning--this is usually the teacher's province. They are also not used to having anyone else's performance depending on them. In many cases it is far too easy for students in Japanese classrooms to not participate or to squeak by with minimal performance. The nice thing about cooperative learning is it can use certain aspects of the culture of the group in Japan give them a feeling that others are relying on them.

The beauty of having the students videotape both the preparation and the performance phase of their skits is that they will know that their fellow classmates might later be watching and evaluating either their preparation for the skit, the skit itself, or both. Thus, if they do not participate, it will be painfully obvious for all to see.

Individual accountability could be further enhanced by telling the students that any member of their group might be asked at random to explain the complete story line of their skit to the teacher or to the whole class. Students would be encouraged to check each other and help each other prepare ahead of time. The teacher can also spot check individuals while they work in groups and before the whole-class activity. Also, any individual group member might be asked to take the quiz mentioned in the positive interdependence section above. The group grade might be partially based on the individual's performance on the quiz.

Last, the observation sheets the students will be filling out while they do the skit activity could be collected by the teacher and double checked by the teacher. The class as a whole could fill out a similar observation sheet while they watch selected videos in class. The group's self-observations could be compared to the class observations of the group as a motivator for students to be accurate.

Group Processing

After working on the script they will use in their skits, the students should add up their total score on the observation sheet and talk about how they did on the skills being practiced. Once they are back in class the class as a whole should do an individual group and a class tally of how well all students stayed in English, checked for clarification, or encouraged participation, for example. Again, the "best" group's efforts could be applauded as could the whole class if it met a class goal (such as keeping the average number of "lapses" into Japanese per group under 10, for example). As mentioned in the results section, time was so short during the study that students were not given any time to process their group's performance. This may have been one of the primary reasons for the lack of improvement in group performance.

Social Skills

In any given task certain social skills will be practiced. For this sample skit, the skills of clarification requests (i.e., when the listener checks to see whether he or she has correctly understood what someone has said to them--being an active listener, for example), encouraging participation (either verbally or by action), and staying in Japanese might be practiced.

Before actually working on the skit T-charts similar to the one in Table 1 could be used as a whole-class activity. On one side would be the three items listed above, and on the other would be a column listing what the students themselves think the particular skills should look like or sound like. The

students could first attempt to fill in the right side in their groups, and then share their results with the class as a whole. Two or three particular examples could be chosen and written on an observation sheet similar to the one in Table 2. Some examples are given on the observation sheet. This observation sheet would be used during the activity for the students to make a count of how often they used each of the skills. The students may make a show of "playing along" as they mark the forms, but they *will* use the forms!

Face-to-Face Interaction

In the course of writing the skits it was often difficult to get students knee to knee and eye-to-eye. Sitting close together is essential for group cohesion and of course it is difficult to share the work on a task if the students are not sitting close together and especially if one student is sitting behind the other two group members. Fortunately, in Japan there is rarely active nonparticipation in Japanese classrooms, but during the study some students seemed to be practicing a form of passive nonparticipation. The method I will use to try to combat this is to have the students talk about what an attentive listener looks like and to have an observer keeping track of each student's participation behavior during the activity. Also, having the students videotape their interactions as they prepare for the videotaping itself will make them especially aware of how they look and will give them visual feedback as they and perhaps the class as a whole look at the videos.

This study left me with the feeling that perhaps the best solution to the problem of having to split groups would be some combination of in-class and L.L. activity. Perhaps the solution would be to teach the entire class all together every week and take attendance, to then have them practice in pairs (since the room is very crowded with the entire class present). Then part of the class could go off to the L.L. in cooperative groups to produce some sort of output (in this case a skit) while the remainder of the class remains with the teacher perhaps doing a cooperative activity. After 20 minutes the groups could switch places. In the end the teacher would have all the students back together in the classroom to turn in a product; this which would help prevent students from "flying the coop" when sent to the L.L.

Conclusion

Cooperative learning can be an effective way to deal with the problems faced by all teachers of foreign languages in Japan. The clearly defined tasks and roles of a good cooperative lesson seem to fit in well with the type of structured learning Japanese students expect while giving them a comfortable, nonstressful environment in which to learn and practice English.

However, cooperative learning as applied to language teaching in general and to the teaching of English in Japan is a new area in which there is much work to be done. More cooperatively structured lessons are needed, as is more research quantifying the effectiveness of cooperative learning in Japan.

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